

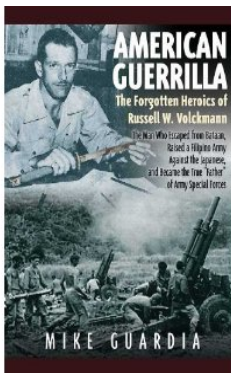


SMALL WARS JOURNAL

smallwarsjournal.com

American Guerrilla: A Review

Alfred H. Paddock, Jr.



In *American Guerrilla: The Forgotten Heroics of Russell W. Volckmann*, Mike Guardia seeks to demonstrate the contributions of Russell Volckmann and his guerrillas in the successful outcome of the US campaign to retake the Philippines from the Japanese during World War II; and, secondly, to establish Volckmann as the true father of Army Special Forces--"a title that history has erroneously awarded to Colonel Aaron Bank." He does an adequate job with the first goal, but his second attempt is flawed.

Guardia tells the story of Volckmann's adventures in the Philippines in a workmanlike manner, and he deserves plaudits for uncovering his "war diary" from the Volckmann family, as well as some of his other primary source research. However, in stating that "the historiography of the guerrilla war in the Philippines is comparatively narrow," he omits some important published sources in his bibliography. These include "Lieutenant Ramsey's War," by Edwin Price Ramsey and Stephen J. Rivele, and "The Intrepid Guerrillas of North Luzon," by Bernard Norling. Norling, a history professor at Notre Dame University for over 35 years, also co-authored other books on resistance movements in the Philippines. His work on the subject is authoritative.

While Guardia confines his tale to Volckmann's role in northern Luzon, the story of Wendell Fertig's accomplishments in the Japanese-occupied island of Mindano is also impressive. At its peak, Fertig commanded an army of 35,000 men, and headed the civil government in one of the largest islands in the world. His accomplishments are told in a novel-like fashion in John Keats' "They Fought Alone: A True Story of a Modern American Hero." Both Volckmann and Fertig later would play leading roles in the development of Army Special Forces.

The author's story of Volckmann's years in the Philippines constitutes the bulk of his book; chapters 1-10 (out of 12), 140 pages. While well-written, it is familiar to those who have read Volckmann's memoir and some of the sources in the author's bibliography. He also overuses entries from Volckmann's war diary, many of which are mundane ("19-24 December 1943. Nothing exciting.")

Guardia claims that "Volckmann's most significant contribution may lie in what he accomplished AFTER the war" [Author's emphasis]. Yet he devotes only eight pages to Chapter 11, which

deals primarily with Volckman's experience during the Korean War, and nine pages to Chapter 12, "Special Forces." It is in his seminal chapter on Special Forces that the author goes astray.

Particularly perplexing is Guardia's diminishment of the importance of Brigadier General Robert A. McClure's role in the development of Special Forces. In late August 1950, after outbreak of the Korean War, Department of Army G-3 Major General Charles Bolte requested McClure's assistance in setting up an office for psychological warfare on the Army staff. (the term, psychological operations, did not come into general usage until the 1960s). McClure had been responsible for Allied psychological warfare in World War II, first in North Africa, then in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) under General Eisenhower. The latter was designated the Psychological Warfare Division, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces (PWD/SHAEF), not the "US Army Psychological Warfare Branch in Europe," as stated by Guardia. The difference is significant; McClure's PWD combined both an operational and staff function for the psychological warfare activities of ALL Allied forces--NOT just the US Army.

In his first staff meeting of what eventually became entitled the Office of the Chief of Psychological Warfare (OCPW), McClure stated that General Bolte agreed with him that unconventional warfare did not belong in G-3 and should be transferred to the OCPW. His association with William Donovan, head of the OSS in World War II, gave him an appreciation for a behind-the-lines capability in the event of war with the Soviet Union. McClure, however, knew that his expertise lay primarily in psychological warfare, so he brought into the OCPW personnel like Volckmann, Aaron Bank, and Wendell Fertig, to develop what became known as the Special Forces Concept. In other words, McClure came to his new job convinced that the Army needed an unconventional warfare capability similar to that of the OSS. It was his leadership and dogged persistence with senior military and civilian Army officials that made it possible for Special Forces to come to fruition.

Guardia overstates the effect of Volckmann's memorandum forwarded to the Army chief of staff following his attendance at a conference at Fort Benning's Infantry School. That memo was indeed important in the chain of events leading up to formation of the 10th Special Forces Group, but it was done with the knowledge and direction of BG McClure. In other words, Volckmann did not go "straight to the chief of staff," as Guardia states. Nor was it Volckmann who "ultimately won the blessings of the Army Chief of Staff and secured the establishment of the Army's first special operations unit: the 10th Special Forces Group." The path to the final concept for Special Forces arrived at by Volckmann, his colleagues, and McClure, was lengthy, tortuous, and marked by controversy. It was a considerably more complex process than that described by the author.

And this statement by the author requires rebuttal: "Reviewing Volckmann's contribution to the development of Special Forces, it begs the question of why he receives virtually no recognition for his involvement and why history has given the lion's share of the credit to Aaron Bank." This is inaccurate. If Guardia had carefully read my "US Army Special Warfare: Its Origins," either the 1982 edition--which is included in his bibliography--or the revised 2002 edition, he would have seen that I give Volckmann credit as THE principal architect in McClure's employ for the development of what eventually became known as the "Special Forces Concept." Indeed, his name is cited no fewer than 15 times in my text, which also includes his photo. Over many

years, I and other authors have repeatedly extolled the unconventional warfare experience of those personnel who served in the Philippines. Volckmann's contributions to the creation of Special Forces are well known among Special Forces veterans and scholars. He is hardly "unknown," as Guardia claims.

My own research has not revealed the rationale for McClure's decision to choose Aaron Bank from his OCPW staff, rather than Volckmann, as the first commander of the 10th Special Forces Group, established concurrently with the Psychological Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, NC, in mid-1952. One may presume, however, a couple of reasons. First, the Army's primary concern--even while fighting a conflict in Korea--was preparation for a possible war with the Soviet Union in Europe. Thus the 10th was targeted to support that potential conflict. Second, OSS organizational principles underlay the initial configuration of the 10th. Bank had served with the OSS in Europe. There is no question that Volckmann's wartime experience and analytical work in guerrilla warfare far exceeded that of Bank, but these qualifications may have not offset the latter's service with OSS in Europe.

Whatever the reasons for his selection, Bank did an admirable job of organizing and training the 10th, both at Fort Bragg and after its deployment to Germany. After retirement from the Army, Bank remained active with the Special Forces community, which selected him as its first honorary colonel of the regiment. Then there is the fact that Bank became the "Father of Army Special Forces" by Congressional decree, an omission by the author.

Another inaccuracy is Guardia's description of the Table of Organization and Equipment that Bank created for the 10th Special Forces Group. He states that Bank "suggested a derivative of the Operational Group concept from the OSS." According to Guardia, Bank created a three-tiered Special Forces group organization of A, B, and C detachments, with the A detachment of 12 personnel as the basic operational unit. In fact, the basic unit in the 10th originally was a 15-man Operational Detachment, Regiment, commanded by a captain, and configured basically with the same personnel skills as the OSS 15-man Operational Group (OG). The next level up was the Operational Detachment, District B, commanded by a major; then the Operational Detachment, District A, commanded by a lieutenant colonel. The A, B, and C structure of Special Forces came into being later.

Then there is this particularly egregious proclamation by the author: "It would also not be appropriate to bestow McClure with the title, 'Father of Special Forces.'" I agree; McClure's contributions were much broader in scope, and applied to both psychological warfare and Special Forces. Indeed, if during his visit to Fort Bragg Guardia had ambled over to the headquarters of the US Army Special Operations Command, he would have seen this plaque mounted at its entrance: "IN MEMORY OF MG ROBERT ALEXIS McCLURE, 4 MAR 1897-1 JAN 1957, THE FATHER OF ARMY SPECIAL WARFARE, BUILDING DEDICATED 19 JANUARY 2001." Above the entrance, in large letters, is etched: "MG ROBERT A. McCLURE BUILDING," and his portrait is prominently displayed in the headquarters building lobby. Without the vision, dedication, and energy of McClure, there would have been no Special Forces and no Psychological Warfare Center at Fort Bragg in 1952--the foundation for today's Army Special Warfare Center and its Special Operations Command.

Further marring Guardia's text is the fact that his endnotes in Chapters 11 and 12 bear no correlation to those in the "Notes" section at the rear of his book. As a further mystery, while he indicates 47 endnotes in his Epilogue, they do not appear in the "Notes" section, all of which indicates a woeful lack of careful editing by the author and his publisher.

In sum, while the author's treatment of Volckmann's experience in the Philippines is reasonably well-written, it breaks little new ground. More important, his justification that the title of "Father of Special Forces rightly belongs to Russell William Volckmann" is superficial, inaccurate, and unprofessionally documented. For these reasons, I do not recommend this book for the general reader, for special operations personnel, or for serious scholars.

Dr. Alfred H. Paddock, Jr., was born February 11, 1937, in Moscow, Idaho, and raised in Bogalusa, Louisiana. He holds a BA degree in political science from Park College, and MA and Ph.D. degrees in history from Duke University. Dr. Paddock completed a 31-year U.S. Army career as a colonel in October, 1988. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the U.S. Army War College. His military career included command and staff assignments in Korea, Okinawa, Laos, Vietnam, and the United States. During the 1960s he served three combat tours in Laos and Vietnam with U.S. Army Special Forces "Green Beret" operational units.

This is a single article excerpt of material published in [Small Wars Journal](#).
Published by and COPYRIGHT © 2010, Small Wars Foundation.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use. Select non-commercial use is licensed via a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and per our [Terms of Use](#). We are in this together.



No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.

Contact: comment@smallwarsjournal.com

Visit www.smallwarsjournal.com

Cover Price: Your call. [Support SWJ here.](#)